

LGBTQ+ Terms, Concepts, and Definitions

OCFS provides these terms and definitions to assist in understanding lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning (LGBTQ+) specific language. However, it is important to remember that terms, concepts, and definitions within the LGBTQ+ community are fluid and can change rapidly. Some definitions may also contain example language to contextualize the term's meaning and use.

- **Affirming Practice:** Practice that proactively creates an environment that intentionally and purposefully supports members of the LGBTQ+ community. LGBTQ+ community members are treated with respect, dignity and have equitable access to services, supports, and opportunities in a manner that sustains their whole selves.
- **Informed Practice:** This term refers to provision of service from a provider who is affirming, possesses relevant training, and a demonstrated history of successfully working with members of the LGBTQ+ community. An example of this might include a medical professional who has training in transition-related health care and have a consistent history of working with transgender clients; or caseworkers who have received training in LGBTQ+ cultural competence and have demonstrated successful outcomes working with LGBTQ+ clients.
- **Safe/Affirming Environment:** A safe and affirming environment is a welcoming and nonjudgmental space in which LGBTQ+ community members can be certain that they will not face discrimination based on their Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and/or Expression (SOGIE). In a safe/affirming environment both youth and adults are responsible for maintaining safety by modeling supportive behavior and holding those accountable who create a hostile environment against LGBTQ+ community members.
- **LGBTQ+ Cultural Responsiveness:** Policies and practice that are informed by the culture and experiences of the LGBTQ+ community. It is a commitment to ongoing education about the history, stigmas, rights, setbacks, politics, and language of an individual's culture to provide support and supervision that are tailored to be sensitive to the experiences of LGBTQ+ community members.
- **Intersectionality:** This term was established by Kimberlé Crenshaw, originally to identify the barriers Black women face in society--specifically marginalization due to both sexism and racism. It has become a term used in social justice work to highlight the compounded negative effects of the intersection of two or more marginalized identities and how they can negatively affect each other. An example would be a person who identifies as a trans-woman and is also blind. As she navigates life, she may experience discrimination for her gender identity, in addition to being marginalized due to her impaired vision. Thus, her gender identity may have a compounding, negative effect on her desire to seek supportive services for blindness, and vice versa.

Sexual/Romantic Orientation Definitions:

- Lesbian: a woman/girl who is emotionally, romantically, and/or sexually attracted to other women/girls.
- Gay: a person who is emotionally, romantically, and/or sexually attracted to people of the same sex/gender. Sometimes, it may be used to refer to gay men and boys only. This term is currently preferred over the term “homosexual.” Someone may identify their romantic orientation as “gay” and not their sexual orientation.
- Bisexual: a person who is emotionally, romantically, and/or sexually attracted not exclusively to people of one sex or gender.
- Asexual: a person who may not experience sexual attraction or has little interest in sexual activity; asexuality exists along a spectrum.
- Pansexual: a person who can be emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to people of all genders. A pansexual person may be, but is not necessarily, a person who identifies as bisexual.
- Aromantic: a person who experiences little to no romantic attraction; aromanticism exists along a spectrum.

Gender Identity Definitions:

- Transgender: an adjective and umbrella term that describes a person/people whose sex assigned at birth differs (in varying degrees) from their gender identity.
 - A child who is assigned female at birth but identifies as male may be referred to a trans-boy/man
 - A child who is assigned male at birth but identifies as female may be referred to a trans-girl/woman
- Gender nonconforming: having or being perceived to have gender characteristics and/or behaviors that do not conform to traditional or societal expectations. These expectations vary across cultures and have changed over time. Gender nonconforming people may or may not identify as LGBTQ+.
- Cisgender: refers to a person whose gender identity matches their assigned sex at birth. If you do not identify as transgender, you are likely cisgender.
- Intersex: refers to a person born with a combination of both male and female chromosomes and/or reproductive anatomy.
- Nonbinary: refers to individuals who do not identify as male or female but as neither, as a combination, and/or as something else.
- 2-Spirit: is a term created by and for the indigenous community. 2-Spirit can be considered a third gender option in some Native American cultures. This term is only to be used to describe members of the Native American community.

Additional Terms:

- Queer: has historically been used in derogatory or violent ways toward LGBTQ+ people. However, the term has been reclaimed for positive use by some LGBTQ+ individuals and communities. The positive usage of this term intentionally does not have a strict definition, and there are three general ways it is used:

- A sexual/romantic orientation identity, used instead of or in addition to identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, etc.
 - A way to broadly refer to people who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender (Ask an individual if they use this word to describe themselves, as some people do not like the term.)
 - A sociopolitical term to signify resistance to the "status quo" of sexuality and/or gender. The term queer should never be used pejoratively.
 - Do not assume all terms, especially the word "queer," are used by all LGBTQ+ adults. These terms may offend older adults and/or be triggering.
-
- Questioning: refers to a time in which someone is unsure of their SOGIE. This is often an internal process and a time of exploration to better understand one's SOGIE.
 - Heteronormativity: The practice that prioritizes heterosexual behaviors and experiences as normative.
 - Cisnormativity: The practice that prioritizes cisgender behaviors and experiences as normative.